



**Bridging CVE and CVP**

## **Boko Haram Conflict Assessment/Map**

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## 1. Summary Description

This document is a conflict map of Boko Haram, one of the most violent terrorist organizations in the world. Boko Haram was founded by Mohammed Yusuf in Nigeria in 2002, but has significantly grown in size and power since 2007, to the point that the Government of Nigeria, unable to deter it, had to postpone its presidential elections in 2015. Nigeria has had to request help from neighboring countries Chad and Niger to contain Boko Haram's threat. Although these countries have conducted some military campaigns against this terrorist organization, they have been cautious in their actions to prevent any type of attacks in their own countries. Boko Haram is also known for the kidnapping of more than 200 girls from the town of Chibok, and for its deadly attacks against civilians and the Nigerian military alike.

This document is structured using Paul Wehr's conflict mapping guide, as presented in his *Conflict Regulation* (1979). This map starts with a brief history of Boko Haram, followed by a description of the parties to the conflict and their leaders. Then, the conflict issues are explored, as well as the previous attempts at conflict resolution and the outcomes of counterterrorism efforts. The map ends with recommendations for future conflict resolution and counterterrorism strategies.

## 2. Conflict History

During the Salafi conflict with the Sufis, some scholars broke away from *Izala* and formed their own independent organizations. One of these organizations was *Ahl al-sunna*, and Mohammed Yusuf was the leader of the youth wing of this organization. With support from Shaikh Ja'afar, Yusuf's mentor and *Ahl al-sunna*'s leader, Yusuf was able to recruit followers not only at the Indimi Mosque where he preached, but also in Cameroon, Chad, and Niger, where Salafi influence was present. As Yusuf became more radicalized, he developed doctrines that put him at odds with Ja'afar. This led to his being banned from preaching at the Indimi Mosque. However, during this time, Yusuf was becoming very popular with disaffected youth who were looking for solutions to life problems in Islam (Mustapha, 2014). As a result, Yusuf founded the Yusufiyya movement which later transformed into *Jama'atu Ahlul Sunna li Da'awati wal Jihad* (People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad) or Boko Haram (Maiangwa, Uzodike, Whetho and Onapajo, 2012; Mustapha, 2014).

Boko Haram has undergone three phases in its evolution. The first phase, known as Kanama (2003-2004), started when a group of 200 youth, including Yusuf followers, disengaged from the secular state and established a revolutionary Islamic community in rural Yobe State on the Nigeria-Niger border. This phase was led by Muhammad Ali, a Nigerian radicalized in Saudi Arabia who fought with the mujahideen in Afghanistan. The group which referred to itself as the Nigerian Taliban launched a series of deadly attacks on government buildings and prisons, as well as police stations in the Nigeria-Cameroon border between December 2003 and October 2004. The Nigerian military clashed with the group, resulting in many lives lost on both sides. The military eventually dismantled the group and accused Yusuf of instigating the uprising. As a result, Yusuf fled to Saudi Arabia, and the surviving members of the group regrouped in Maiduguri (Mustapha, 2014).

The second phase, known as *daawa*, or radical proselytization (2005-2009), began after Yusuf returned to Nigeria from Saudi Arabia in 2005. He had brokered a deal with the Borno State Governor and Shaikh Ja'afar during a 2005 pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia. Yusuf stated that he did not have anything to do with the Kanama insurgency and promised to never engage or profess jihadi practices again. However, it is during this phase that the greatest extremist indoctrination, recruitment, and radicalization of members occurred. Yusuf set base for his group in a land that his father-in-law had given to him in Maiduguri. He began criticizing the corruption of the Governor of Borno State as well as the conspicuous consumption of Western-educated elites while the bulk of the population lived in abject poverty. Yusuf's comments landed him in Abuja jails several times; however, every time, he returned unhurt to Maiduguri, becoming a "legendary" figure who was able to fight the corrupt and mighty in the name of Islam (Mustapha, 2014).

The third phase of the insurrection started in June 2009 with an incident involving a few Boko Haram members who were following a procession of a deceased member on motorbikes. A new law had been passed requiring motorcyclists to wear protective helmets; however, a Boko Haram member did not comply with the law and was killed by police forces. To avenge the member's death, the insurgents clashed with the police, resulting in seventeen insurgents dead, and many more wounded and arrested (Orsini, 2015; Maiangwa, Uzodike, Whetho and Onapajo, 2012). After this happened, Yusuf swore revenge against the state. In July 2009, the insurgents launched their retaliation against the police in Borno, Bauchi, Yobe, Gombe, Kano, and Katsina States.

Then, the attacks also included civilian targets. Boko Haram burnt 25 churches, and destroyed 200 houses, including police stations, in Maiduguri. These attacks and clashes with the police resulted in more than 800 deaths, mostly of insurgents. Hundreds of Boko Haram members were arrested, including Yusuf, who was later executed on July 30, 2009 (Mustapha, 2014). These events mark a period of direct violence for Boko Haram; however, it is important to point out that initially, they use violence as the "underdogs" to get out of a structural iron cage, and then, as described below in this document, to maintain their power as the "top dogs" (Friedman, 2004).

After the July 2009 incidents, Boko Haram disappeared for a few months, but reorganized and resurfaced in 2010 under the leadership of Abubakar Shekau, becoming one of the bloodiest terrorist organizations in the world. Under Shekau's leadership, Boko Haram starts its strategy to exterminate the non-Muslim population for the establishment of an Islamic state in northern Nigeria (Orsini, 2015). Among its terrorist tactics, Boko Haram has used targeted assassinations, drive-by shootings, suicide bombings, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and vehicle-borne IEDs. These tactics fall under what Cunningham (2004) describes as the six basic tactics that comprise 95% of all terrorist incidents.

Under Boko Haram's new strategy, their targets have included people with whom they disagree on doctrinal or political matters, schools, churches, mosques of their perceived opponents, the police, the military, traditional authorities, political leaders, and symbolic targets like the Police Headquarters in Abuja and the UN building in Abuja, bombed in June 2011 and August 2011, respectively (Mustapha, 2014). These actions go in line with some of the concepts presented in the film *In the Name of God: Holy Word, Holy War*, where terrorists justify the killing of

civilians because although they are not in direct war with the terrorists, they support what the terrorists are against, and hence, become their enemies.

Some of Boko Haram's most significant terrorist acts have included the attacks on the St. Theresa's Catholic Church on Christmas 2011, killing 43 church-goers. Coordinated attacks in Kano in January 2012 were also deadly, targeting the police, the State Security Services, and prisons, with a total of 186 people killed. Then, in April 2012, suicide bombers attacked the *ThisDay* newspaper offices in Kaduna and Abuja (Mustapha, 2014). On April 14, 2014, Boko Haram kidnapped 276 girls from a school in Chibok (Orsini, 2015)<sup>1</sup>. However, Boko Haram's deadliest attack occurred in January 2015, when they assaulted the town of Baga, killing more than 2,000 people, including women, children, and elders (Mark, 2015). In total, Boko Haram has killed more than 13,000 people, and has displaced more than 1.5 million since 2009 (Orsini, 2015).

### 3. Conflict Context

Most of the conflict in Nigeria occurs in the northern part of the country, which is an area with a population of approximately 53 million people. Most of the population in this area is Muslim, of which 95% is Sunni. There is also a Christian minority in this region that is originally from the south and lives in constant fear. Boko Haram members are mainly Sunni, but attack all Muslims, who in their opinion, are not sufficiently pure to deserve being alive (Orsini, 2015). The states where Boko Haram is strongest and has been able to draw most of its recruits from are Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa. Additionally, it is important to point out that most of Boko Haram fighters come from the Kanuri ethnic group, which is the largest in the three aforementioned states (BBC, 2016). Based on the ethnic composition of the population in northern Nigeria, the probability of terrorism is greater. Weinberg (2006) states that socially homogeneous countries are less vulnerable to terrorism.

Boko Haram can be understood as the culminating point in a long tradition of Islamic revolts in the history of Nigeria since its independence. These revolts have included Uthman Dan Fodio's jihadist revolution, Saybu dan Makafo's Mahdist revolts, and Maitatsine's and Musa Makaniki's insurrections. What all these revolts have in common is that they have completely opposed and condemned Western thought. This comes as no surprise since the British controlled Nigeria from 1903 until its independence on October 1, 1960. Although Nigeria gained independence from the British, the latter's legacy remained in the country's elites, who have always been opposed and condemned by Nigerian Islamist groups (Orsini, 2015).

Most recently, with the growth of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the reach of Boko Haram has expanded. This is not new, however, as Boko Haram had previously been affiliated with Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb but abandoned it as ISIS became stronger and more appealing. ISIS accepted Boko Haram's pledge to their organization, naming the area controlled by Boko Haram as the Islamic State of West Africa Province and as part of the global caliphate they are trying to establish (BBC, 2016).

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<sup>1</sup> On Sunday, May 7, the Nigerian government announced that 82 of the girls who had been kidnapped had been released in exchange for handing over at least six suspected Boko Haram militants.

#### 4. Parties to the conflict and their Leaders

##### Government of Nigeria

The Government of Nigeria is one of the primary parties in this conflict. It perceives Boko Haram as a threat that must be stopped. Since violence erupted in 2009, the Nigerian leader that has been in charge of the problem for the longest time has been former President Goodluck Jonathan. Jonathan's election to the presidency increased tensions with Boko Haram as he is from southern Nigeria and a Christian. At one point, Boko Haram demanded that Jonathan convert to Islam as an essential condition for there to be a ceasefire (Maiangwa, Uzodike, Whetho and Onapajo, 2012).

In 2010, Jonathan assumed the presidency after the death of his predecessor, Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, and found himself in the difficult task of dealing with Boko Haram early in his term. Unfortunately, he was not able to manage the insurgency, and his presidency was considered a failure in terms of stopping Boko Haram. In fact, during his term (2010 to 2015), Boko Haram became more powerful, dangerous, and destabilizing (Liman, 2015).

People in Nigeria do not trust their government. This is consequence of decades of corrupt military and civilian leadership that has only cared about their own interests. Past and present ruling elites have not provided Nigerians with physical infrastructure, primary health care, rule of law, and security. Despite its massive oil reserves, Nigeria continues being a poor country, with 80% of its population living on less than two dollars per day. Corrupt governments have failed to transform the country's natural resources into wealth and opportunities for their citizens (Maiangwa, Uzodike, Whetho and Onapajo, 2012).

Poverty and inequality could be one of the causes of terrorism. Weinberg (2006) states that "the more unevenly distributed the income, the greater is the frequency of terrorist events, especially when perpetrated by ideologically motivated groups" (p. 47). Additionally, the cause of violence in Nigeria can also be explained by Gurr's relative deprivation theory. Relative deprivation is the perceived difference between value expectations and value capabilities (Cunningham, 2004). That is, it is the difference between what a person or group thinks it is entitled to have, and what they currently have. As mentioned above, northern Nigeria is an impoverished area where people do not have what they think they are entitled to. Additionally, in this region of Nigeria, there is a perception that the wealthy elite throughout the country tends to be Christian, while the most impoverished communities are Muslim (Agbibo, 2013). Over the long run, deprivation creates frustration, and frustration leads to aggression. This may very well be the reason why so many northern Nigerian youth have joined extremist groups.

Nigeria's current President Muhammadu Buhari has also been criticized by the media, and labeled as delusional, given that in two occasions, he has stated his government had defeated Boko Haram. First on December 25, 2015, Buhari stated, "So I think technically we have won the war because people are going back into their neighborhoods. Boko Haram as an organized fighting force, I assure you, that we have dealt with them." Then on February 20, 2016, Buhari once again made a similar statement: "We, however, take pride to inform you that since our coming to power, Boko Haram has been systematically decimated and are in no position to cause

serious threat to our development programs” (Utietiang, 2016). Considering what continues happening in northern Nigeria with Boko Haram, these statements make the government even less credible than before.

## **Boko Haram**

Boko Haram is also one of the primary parties in this conflict. This organization’s overriding goal is to take control away from the Nigerian state, establish an Islamic Caliphate in Nigeria, and impose Sharia law across the country. It is important to point out that the organization wants to be independent from the Government of Nigeria. In fact, in August 2014, Shekau declared a caliphate in areas under Boko Haram’s control, with Gwoza as its center of power. Joined by masked fighters, Shekau stated, “We are in an Islamic caliphate. We have nothing to do with Nigeria. We don’t believe in this name” (Grossman, 2016).

Boko Haram is not a monolithic organization with a unified purpose; in fact, it has several factions, but in 2016 these divisions became clearer: there is a rift between Abubakar Shekau and Abu Musab al-Barnawi (Agbibo, 2013). Shekau became Boko Haram’s leader at the time of the launch of the insurgency in 2009, and still is the organization’s most well-known member. However, on August 3, 2016, the Islamic State announced that Boko Haram had a new leader, namely al-Barnawi. A few hours after this announcement, Shekau released an audio claiming that he was still in charge, but was changing his title to imam. Then, in a video issued on August 7, 2016, Shekau accused al-Barnawi of manipulating ISIS into replacing him. In the video, al-Barnawi also said that ISIS leader Abubakar al-Baghdadi still had to respond to the accusation that he is polytheist and not an authentic Salafist (Zenn, 2016).

Although Shekau and al-Barnawi are the main Boko Haram figures, there are other factions as well. A US House of Representatives report indicates that the group may have split into three factions: 1) one that is moderate and would like an end to violence; 2) another that wants a peace agreement; and 3) yet another one that refuses negotiations and aims to implement strict Sharia law across Nigeria. Additionally, now locals can distinguish between other factions of Boko Haram, which they call Kogi Boko Haram, Kanuri Boko Haram, and Hausa Fulani Boko Haram (Agbibo, 2013).

Boko Haram’s members include university lecturers, bankers, political elites, drug addicts, unemployed graduates, almajiris<sup>2</sup>, and migrants from neighboring countries. As mentioned above, most members come from the Kanuri tribe, but also from the Hausa-Fulani. Boko Haram members distinguish themselves by growing long beards and wearing red or black headscarves. As was discussed above, those who are attracted by Boko Haram might do so as a result of deep socioeconomic and political grievances, including lack of good governance and perception of an unfettered corruption among the elites. As a result of the socioeconomic conditions in the north, Boko Haram is now gaining support from a large impoverished population (Agbibo, 2013).

The organization’s structure consists of an emir who heads a 30-person Shura Council. Each council member oversees a cell of militants that focuses on a specific geographic area. Rank-and-file recruits only have limited knowledge of and exposure to counterparts in other cells. The

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<sup>2</sup> Almajiri refers to a poor or destitute person or population.

Shura Council provides direction to Boko Haram's operations, with most decisions agreed in this forum (Nugent, 2013). As of October 31, 2014, the estimated number of Boko Haram combatants reached 20,000 (Standford, 2016).

Up until 2012, it had been very difficult for Nigerian government officials to trace Boko Haram's funding. The only known fact was that the bulk of the funding came from bank robberies and related criminal activities, including kidnappings for ransoms and extortions (The Institute, 2015). However, arrested Boko Haram members revealed that initially, they depended on contributions from members, but their ties with Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) opened more opportunities for funding from groups in Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom. Other sources of funding also include the Al Muntanda Trust Fund and the Islamic World Society. A spokesperson of Boko Haram also revealed that the governors of Kano and Bauchi paid the terrorist organization monthly. These two politicians are not the only government officials financing Boko Haram (Agbiboa, 2013). Another report states that a high official in Nigeria's Central Bank has also supported the organization (Mustapha, 2014).

Post (2006) talks about the importance of structure and leadership of terrorist organizations. He claims that it is very important that these organizations have a leader that is able to unite all the disaffected youth. The main issue with Boko Haram is its divided leadership. This means that although there are many cells, not all of them respond to the same leaders, making them weaker in terms of being able to organize larger attacks or obtain funding. Also, targeting these subgroups of terrorist organizations has proven more effective than targeting these organizations at higher levels.

## 5. Conflict Issues

This conflict can be understood as a values-based conflict. Boko Haram's ideology is in conflict with the status quo. Boko Haram is a Salafist extremist organization that traces its ideology to the Salafi movement, which is part of Sunni Islam (The Institute, 2015). Hence, this ideology is embedded in the deep tradition of Islamism, and is one of several variants of radical Islamism that has emerged in northern Nigeria. The adherents of this ideology are wrongly influenced by Quranic verse TQM5:44, which states the following: "Anyone who is not governed by what Allah has revealed is among the transgressors" (Agbiboa, 2013).

To understand Boko Haram's ideology, it is also important to understand the translation of this organization's name: it derives from a combination of the Hausa word for book (*boko*), and the Arabic word for forbidden (*haram*). Hence, put together Boko Haram literally means "Western education is forbidden." The group has rejected this definition however; instead, it prefers the definition "Western culture is forbidden" (Agbiboa, 2013). Boko Haram strongly opposes what it interprets as Western-based incursions that threaten traditional values, beliefs, and customs in Muslim communities across northern Nigeria. Yasuf once told the BBC, "Western-style education is mixed with issues that run contrary to our beliefs in Islam" (BBC News, 2009). In a different interview, he mentioned that, "Our land was an Islamic state before the colonial masters turned it to a *kafir* land" (Agbiboa, 2013).

Boko Haram's ideology, and Yasuf's statements above, are completely in line with Richardson's (2006) and Rubin's (2008) assessments of religious fundamentalism and Islamic extremism. The common denominator of groups supporting religious extremism is that "the modern idea of secular nationalism [is] insufficient in moral, political, and social terms" (Richardson, 2006). Additionally, Rubin (2008) claims that Islamic extremism is a "reaction to a dislocation of modern times, the impact of Western ideas, and the perceived failure of other political philosophies in places where Muslims live."

Yasuf's views against the Western world were very radical. He used to condemn science and technology, and opposed Western culture in all forms. He promoted the idea that the Earth was not round because that goes against Islamic doctrine, and he also claimed that he does not believe that rain is a result of evaporation: "We think that rain is a creation of God, more than a result of evaporation created by the sun" stated Yasuf in an interview given to the BBC (Orsini, 2015).

Boko Haram members believe in the supremacy of Islamic culture, and are convinced that moral and social decadence promoted by Western values and culture has destroyed the fabric of Nigerian society. They are committed to rid their society of corruption and moral deprivation. Backed by the Quran's verse above, adherents of Boko Haram state that those who do not fit this ideology are evil and wrongdoers. Spiritual identity is central to Boko Haram and provides the basis for recruitment and for motivating members into action (Maiangwa, Uzodike, Whetho and Onapajo, 2012).

## **6. Previous attempts at Conflict Resolution or Counter-Terrorism**

There have been at least three types of efforts to try to stop Boko Haram. First, a coalition with neighboring countries; second, the establishment of a joint task force (JTF); and third, an attempt to dialogue with Boko Haram for a ceasefire and to negotiate the release of the Chibok girls.

### **West African Coalition**

In 2005, five African states agreed to form a Multinational Joint Task Force to fight Boko Haram. The force comprises 8,700 troops from Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Benin. According to Nigeria's president Buhari, the coalition has the military capacity to sustain the push against the insurgents. The establishment of the coalition marked an important step for the countries directly affected by Boko Haram. Under Buhari's predecessor, Goodluck Jonathan, Cameroon and Chad complained that their efforts to defeat Boko Haram were being blocked by Nigeria's refusal to let their troops cross the border, allowing the insurgents to regroup in Nigerian soil. The Western African Coalition has a budget of \$30 million and is headed by a Nigerian. To assure impartiality, the military coalition is based in N'djamena, capital of Chad (Dawber, 2015).

The Multinational Joint Task Force has had mixed results. Critics say that regional rivalries, internal political turmoil, and language differences prevent the five countries part of the Multinational Joint Task Force from effectively collaborating. Other say that each country of the coalition is operating on its own and that collaboration only occurs on a needs basis or when they



are forced to work together. Boko Haram remains powerful in some northern Nigerian territories, so the Multinational Joint Task Force's effectiveness has also been questioned for this (Stein, 2016).

### **Joint Task Force (JTF)**

In June 2011, the Nigerian Governments created a Joint Task Force (JTF) in Borno State called "Operation Restore Order." This task force is made up of personnel from the Nigerian Armed Forces, Nigerian Police Force, the Department of State Services, the Nigerian Immigration Service and the Defense Intelligence Agencies. Its mandate is to restore law and order in northern-eastern Nigeria. In August 2013, the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division of the army was created with a total of 8,000 troops to take over from the JTF the war against Boko Haram. However, just like the Multinational Joint Task Force, the JFT has not had any positive impact on the level of violence in Nigeria. (Mustapha, 2014). In fact, it seems the impact was negative as it made Boko Haram change its tactics and become more violent.

### **Dialogue and Ceasefire**

On October 17, 2014, the Government of Nigeria announced a ceasefire with Boko Haram. However, just hours after the ceasefire, Boko Haram stroke in Borno State killing one man, and the following day, 8 people were also killed in Borno. Two weeks after the ceasefire, Shekau stated the following: "We have not made ceasefire with anyone. What is our business with negotiation? We did not negotiate with anyone... It's a lie: it's a lie. We will not negotiate." Apparently, the government did negotiate with Boko Haram; however, it was the wrong Boko Haram they negotiated with. Reports say that it seems the government communicated with a powerless negotiator, most likely an impostor. This gave even less legitimacy to the Government of Nigeria in its fight against Boko Haram (Soyombo, 2014).

The Government of Nigeria has also tried to have to have talks with Boko Haram to liberate the more-than-200-kidnapped Chibok girls. The Government of Nigeria had been having talks with Boko Haram since 2015, shortly after President Buhari took office. Negotiations were derailed three times, however. In one case, this happened at the last minute although the president agreed to release imprisoned Boko Haram fighters. On a different occasion, the talks failed because key Boko Haram members that were in the negotiations team were killed. However, talks to release the Chibok girls have been successful twice: first, in October 2016, when 21 girls were released, and second, on May 6, 2017, when 82 girls were released (Busari and Croft, 2017).

## **7. Recommendation for future Conflict Resolution or Counter-Terrorism strategy**

It is clear that negotiations with Boko Haram to stop the conflict have not worked. Additionally, Nigeria is not willing to accept the terms of Boko Haram to negotiate. That is, the Nigerian state will not give autonomy to Boko Haram to establish a caliphate in the northern part of this country. The use of force has not been effective either. Force is usually the weapon of choice by governments to fight terrorism; however, it has had mixed results (Kurth, 2009). As a result, an effective approach to resolving the conflict in Nigeria should focus on the root causes of why people are joining Boko Haram.

Earlier in this conflict map, I spoke about relative deprivation theory as one of the possible causes of people joining Boko Haram. To prevent further recruitment of Boko Haram and of youth joining this terrorist group, the Government of Nigeria needs to start filling the void that it has left in the northern part of its territory. If the Government of Nigeria starts fulfilling the basic needs of people in the northern territories, the likelihood of youth joining Boko Haram will decrease.

Efforts to increase government presence in the northern states of Nigeria should be accompanied by radicalization prevention interventions, focusing on teaching youth about the peaceful nature of the Qur'an, as well as providing youth with opportunities during their free time so they do not become easy preys of recruiters. The state needs to ensure that basic needs of the population are covered and that the vast natural resources of Nigeria are well-managed, so most of the population can benefit from them.

A soft approach will not be enough to single-handedly stop Boko-Haram in Nigeria. Radicalization prevention interventions should be accompanied by the existing Joint Task Forces efforts, both domestic and international, so terrorism is contained, while opportunities are generated for youth at the greatest risk of joining Boko Haram. Reinsertion opportunities should also be given to those who would like to leave Boko Haram.

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